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REVIEWS.

The Workers: An Experiment in Reality. The East and The West. By WALTER A. WYCKOFF. New York, Charles Scribner's Sons, 1898. — x, 270; x, 378 pp.

Inspired by close contact with a friend of "intimate familiarity with practical affairs" and "catholic sympathy with human nature," Mr. Wyckoff spent some eighteen months among the laboring classes, trying thus to bridge the gulf between his own "slender, book-learned lore and [that friend's] vital knowledge of men and the principles by which they live and work" (preface). In that time he travelled, mostly on foot, from Connecticut to California, living by "odd jobs," — as farm hand, hostler, lumberman, day laborer, *etc.*, — and of necessity mingling with all manner of men. The story of his adventures is certainly interesting; but the nature of the undertaking, as a so-called "application of the laboratory method to sociological research," is to the student of affairs economic and sociological a matter of much greater importance.

From the outset it is clear that the writer is a novice in dealing with the hard facts of life. When serving his apprenticeship with the pick and shovel, he made the epoch-making discovery that, when "down sweeps your pick with a mighty stroke" upon a concealed stone, the contact "sends a violent jar through all your frame, causing vibrations which end in the sensation of an electric shock at your finger-tips" (I, 114)! Very early, too, Mr. Wyckoff received a "revelation in the discovery of the degree to which profanity is ingrained in the vernacular" of "the laboring poor" (I, 58); and the naïveté of his exclamations of horror over the cursing of some urchins (I, 60) is comparable only with his attempts at softening the oaths of lumbermen (I, 217, 239). More convincing evidence as to the equipment and point of view of this investigator is found in his astonishment at the "unlooked-for quality in the intelligence of the people" — a wonder at first arising from the not infrequent discovery of books, even copies of Milton and Emerson, on sitting-room tables (I, 17)! Later, however, he found better ground for his wonder (see I, 119; II, 241); and it was after discussing with a Pennsylvania farmer the alleged grievances of the farming class that he wrote: "I went

to bed pitying myself for my shallow judgment and my ignorance of life" (I, 178). Verily, it appears that Lincoln's "people," and their ways of life, must from time to time be rediscovered.

"An experiment in reality" is the subtitle of this work, into which, says the preface, "no element of fiction has intentionally been allowed to intrude." Yet is not fiction the most prominent feature? Many of our author's heroes among the workers are built on Homeric lines, but even his language apparently fails to do justice to the women. One Swedish girl has cheeks of "translucent pink" and "rich red lips [that] were as delicately formed as in the Psyche of Praxiteles" (II, 358); a woman, whose parcel he carried, had heavy hair of "tawny red, like that of Titian's 'Magdalene' in the Pitti" (II, 65); and the harlot, whose alms he refused, had—he noticed in a driving storm—a mouth "of almost faultless drawing, with a dimple at each corner" and a "chin of perfect moulding" (II, 31). Possibly it may have been charms like these, embodied in the young woman whom he had admired when an usher at a wedding at St. Thomas's, that led him, on meeting her when he was wearing his laborer's garb, to laugh "a short, harsh laugh" (I, 50).

The same theatrical element constantly appears in other forms. Thus, when asked to conduct a prayer meeting—apparently not an unfamiliar process—in a lumbermen's village, our author felt the pressure of a "cold, hard grip upon [his] heart," but "in another moment [he] was cooler, and a strange, unreasoning peace ensued" (I, 264). In the very first week, too, he begins to speak for—as if of—the laborers with whom he worked. Thus: "*We* worked as though possessed by a curious numbness that kept us half-unconscious of the straining effort, *which had become mechanical*" (I, 47). Soon he says: "*We* are unskilled laborers 'selling' our mere muscular strength," without the "joy of responsibility," leading "hard, barren, hopeless lives" (I, 61 on). Almost as well might a man attempt, after spending a day in a maternity hospital, to express fairly the pangs of childbirth! And when he says, "I am learning, by experience, what it is to look for work . . . under the spur of hunger and cold, and of the animal instinct of self-preservation" (II, 1), we do indeed, remembering that he has almost within call a well-to-do friend (II, 82), feel the weight of his evidence.

Even more misleading are his attempts to characterize individuals. Of the men in the lodging-house, he says, "each was absorbed in his own *bitterness*." True? After seeing for a few moments a misanthropic old farmer, he comments: "And so he disappeared, *as strange*

a human being as the world holds, living tremendously a life of strenuous endeavor, yet Godless and hopeless and loveless in it all, except for the greedy love of gain, which holds him in miserable bondage, as he works his life away" (I, 164). When two sisters of charity pass him on the street, he dilates: "Their sweet, placid faces, framed in white, reflected the limpid purity of unselfish useful living, and their eyes, deep-seeing into human misery and evil, were yet serene in the all-conquering strength of goodness" (II, 81). Could fiction do more — or worse?

On almost every page of Mr. Wyckoff's book is the suggestion of a problem on which light is needed — and not supplied. Thus, we want to know how seriously, and with what results, the average laborer seeks employment (II, 71-8), how severe is the disappointment of such a man on not finding work (I, 11; II, 46), why there are congested labor markets when the farmers are without helpers (II, 298; v. I, 173, and II, 251), how far the workingman can and will improve his leisure (I, 180), how often the saloon aids the poor man and how often it serves to deepen despair (II, 54, 62), how large a part of the laboring class regard vice as "simply inherent in the order of things" (I, 254), for how many workers the future holds out only the prospect of more indulgence, made possible by prodigality (II, 184). We must, indeed, learn — if our study of social movements is to be at all intelligent — whether artisans and laborers commonly shirk their work (II, 259), whether employers generally are alert to discover and develop ability (II, 182), whether unions habitually force down the standard of skill and industry (II, 278), whether the Pennsylvania farmer (I, 192) or the Chicago station-house lodger (II, 38) is to be regarded as typical of any large part of American society, whether the Philistinism of the sturdy farmer, "with utter disregard of the duty of helpfulness," is more widespread than the socialist's dream of the collectivist order of society (II, 111, 213-43) or the Western agitator's demand for governmental aid to farmers (II, 297). Above all, perhaps, we need to ascertain what are the true lines of cleavage in society — between the classes of leisure and of work (I, 32), of dirty and of clean work (II, 162), of the skilled and the unskilled (I, 38), of social convention (I, 106), of the rich and the poor (II, 207), of moral weakness and of character (II, 38, 39), of shirkers and workers (I, 57, 158, 166; II, 182, 278, 295, 320, 332). All these — and countless more — questions remain to be answered *after* reading these volumes, so that one naturally repeats the author's own question: "What real purpose was [the] experiment to serve?"

And the answer is found in his own words: "I had discovered . . . nothing that was new to science, and the experiment of a single individual could never furnish data for a valid generalization. . . . Moreover, it was impossible for me to rightly interpret even the human conditions in which I found myself." Such a frank admission — especially as coming from a writer who has all along freely acknowledged his ignorance, his inexperience and his distrust of his own conclusions — almost disarms criticism; yet the preface to the work, written years after the above thoughts are supposed to have passed through his mind, speaks of this as a "new, unoccupied, inviting field, 'offering a fair prospect' to a student *eager for a place among original investigators*." From this point of view, the experiment itself must be regarded as a failure; although it has doubtless been (aside from its practical results) of considerable value to the writer personally, where he has rightly understood the life about him. But the work — however interesting it is, and perhaps the more because it is interesting — must be regarded as distinctly harmful, so far as it leads readers to imagine that from it they gain true conceptions of our industrial conditions and so far as it maintains the belief that such methods of investigation can yield results of value to science.

The vital defect of such methods lies in the false assumption on which they are based — the assumption, namely, that a stranger's study (usually of necessity limited in time and scope) of the outward circumstances of the life of a class can reveal the *essentials* of that life. The "slumming" youth, whose "unwholesome curiosity" as to station-house lodgers seems to our author to be a "deliberate insult" to the objects (II, 87); the amateur dabbler of the aggressively and ignorantly "reforming" type in local politics; the impulsive and inexperienced young persons aiming to "uplift the slums" — these and others of their kind are continually preventing real progress, by collecting and diffusing new misinformation and setting in motion new cross-currents of prejudice. The spirit back of such efforts is doubtless commendable; and it is good to know that there are many who are not "indifferent to the vital needs of the world and to the pressing problems of its life" (II, 209); but the "way," the "something to do," remains to be pointed out. Nor is it likely to be discovered through such voyages of social discovery as those just alluded to, if Mr. Wyckoff — certainly equipped with high purpose, with great steadfastness and with keen powers of observation — has nothing but negative results for others than himself. His volumes serve, in fact, to prove — by their unreality, their incompleteness,

their fanciful interpretation of motives and of character — how barren is *this* conception of the “laboratory method” as applied to the study of social conditions.

A. M. DAY.

COLUMBIA UNIVERSITY.

Problems of Modern Industry. By SIDNEY and BEATRICE WEBB.
London, Longmans, Green & Co., 1898. — 286 pp.

The papers in this volume have already been published, but their collection in a new form will be justified by all readers; for no one has stated more coherently or more powerfully than these authors the great issues upon which the industrial struggles of the next generation will center. A single passage may represent the Webbs' point of view.

When we are concerned with the propertied classes — when, for instance, it is sought to open up to women higher education or the learned professions — it is easy to see that freedom is secured by abolishing restrictions. But when we come to the restrictions between capital and labor, an entirely new set of considerations come into play. In the life of the wage-earning class, absence of regulation does not mean personal freedom.

If three of the eleven chapters be excepted, all the others are, explicitly or by implication, a justification of the passage quoted. Those on “Women's Wages,” “Women and the Factory Acts,” “Hours of Labor,” “Sweating System,” “The Poor Law,” “Coöperation and Trade Unionism” — one and all give proof, in theory or by appeal to experience, that social forces must be organized in defense of the mass of the laborers. The English factory system, moreover, is studied to show how much more freedom the laborer has under its régime than would be found in unregulated industries of the same class of labor.

This discussion is now of special importance for those interested in our American situation. Here the strong and successful object to “regulation.” This class, even among the wage-earners, are perhaps growingly contemptuous of trade-union restrictions, if only they (the successful workers) are able to get advantages from machine production. The increasing superiority of this country over England in the iron and steel industry is certainly in part owing to the lack of trade unions here or to their practical subjection. Thus, the Illinois Steel Company has trade unions, but all employees must sign a clause which expressly states that the new applications of science and invention shall be absolutely in the hands of the company. The trade union cannot here, as in England, delay for a moment the adoption